

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 QUEBEC 0339

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJ: QUEBEC MUST DECIDE BETWEEN THE HEART AND THE POCKETBOOK

1. SUMMARY: SINCE THE ELECTION SOME NINE MONTHS AGO, THE PQ GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN A SOURCE BOTH OF PRIDE AND OF FEAR FOR THE MAJORITY OF QUEBECOIS. AGLITTER WITH UNUSUAL TALENT, THE CABINET INCLUDES THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST OF QUEBEC'S VITAL POST-QUIET-REVOLUTION SOCIETY. PARADOXICALLY, SAME GOVERNMENT'S AUDACIOUS SELF-CONFIDENCE SEEMS TO INTIMIDATE MANY ORDINARY QUEBECOIS--ESPECIALLY THOSE OVER THIRTY YEARS OF AGE--WHO MATURED IN THE OLD INTROSPECTIVE, TRADITIONALLY CONSERVATIVE SOCIETY DOMINATED FROM WITHIN BY THE CHURCH AND FROM WITHOUT BY AN ANGLOPHONE MINORITY WHICH CONTROLLED THE BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL LIFE OF THE PROVINCE FOR SOME 200 YEARS. IN PROSPEROUS TIMES, THE SURVIVAL ORIENTED INSTINCTS OF THE OLD SOCIETY WOULD BE SUBMERGED, AND THE EBULIENT SPIRIT OF UNCORKED NATIONALISM WOULD PROBABLY REIGN IN QUEBEC. HOWEVER, A HARSH ECONOMIC RECESSION WITH DOUBLE DIGIT UNEMPLOYMENT NOW GRIPS QUEBEC DISCOURAGING ADVENTUROUSNESS AND THREATENING THE TENDER GROWTH OF SELF-CONFIDENCE. THUS, FEAR OF AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE LIMITS SUPPORT FOR AN OTHERWISE POPULAR GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY. CONFIDENTIAL

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2. PARTI QUEBECOIS' PERFORMANCE DURING ITS FIRST NINE MONTHS IN OFFICE HAS BEEN NEITHER A DREADFUL FAILURE NOR A SMASHING SUCCESS. INITIALLY, IT STUMBLERED AND FUMBLERED AS ITS INTELLECTUALLY SUPERIOR BUT INEXPERIENCED MINISTERS GOT ACQUAINTED WITH THEIR OFFICES AND WITH THE NEED FOR COORDINATION WITH COLLEAGUES IN THE NEW GOVERNMENTAL TEAM. THIS PROBLEM OF "BREAKING-IN"

THE NEW MACHINE HAS NOW LARGELY BEEN ACCOMPLISHED. POPULATION'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PARTI QUEBECOIS GOVERNMENT HAVE HARDENED SOMEWHAT AT THE EXTREMES OF OPINION SPECTRUM SINCE THE ELECTION BUT REMAIN AMBIVALENT AMONG THE SOME 40 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION WHO ARE NOT FIRMLY COMMITTED FOR OR AGAINST THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT AND ITS STATED SOVEREIGNTIST GOALS. THE GOQ REMAINS A SOURCE OF PRIDE TO THE MAJORITY OF QUEBECOIS AS A GENUINE "NATIONAL" GOVERNMENT AND ITS MEMBERS AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST OF POST-QUIET-REVOLUTION QUEBEC SOCIETY. EVEN ITS CRITICS ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS PROBABLY THE MOST HIGHLY QUALIFIED CABINET FROM AN INTELLECTUAL STANDPOINT EVER ASSEMBLED IN CANADA. HOWEVER, WHILE THEY MAY FEEL A NATIONALIST PRIDE IN THEIR PQ CABINET, A MAJORITY OF QUEBECOIS REMAIN FRIGHTENED OF AND OPPOSED TO THE PQ'S SEPARATIST OBJECTIVES. IN FACT, OPPOSITION TO INDEPENDENCE HAS GROWN ACCORDING TO LATEST GALLUP POLL TO POINT WHERE SOME 70 PERCENT OF QUEBEC RESPONDANTS EXPRESSED OPPOSITION TO AN UNNUANCED INDEPENDENCE. THERE SEEMS BE TWO REASONS FOR THIS GROWTH IN OPPOSITION. THE FIRST IS PROBABLY MANIFESTATION OF HISTORICALLY WEAK CONFIDENCE AMONG QUEBECOIS IN THEIR COLLECTIVE ABILITY TO PROSPER SEPARATED FROM THE REST OF CANADA AND IN COMPETITION WITH THEIR MORE AGGRESSIVE AND INDIVIDUALISTIC ANGLOPHONE NEIGHBORS. THE SECOND REASON, WHICH TENDS REINFORCE THE FIRST, IS THE DISMAL STATE OF THE ECONOMY.

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3. ECONOMIC CRISIS: THE GOVERNMENT'S INEFFECTIVENESS IN COMING TO GRIPS WITH THE PRICKLY PROBLEMS OF AN ECONOMY SUFFERING FROM ACUTE STAGFLATION COUPLED WITH RISING DOUBLE DIGIT UNEMPLOYMENT IS NO DOUBT MAJOR FACTOR IN THIS CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE. INSTEAD OF ENERGETICALLY TACKLING THE ADMITTEDLY INTRACTABLE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, THE GOQ CHOSE IN FIRST LEGISLATIVE SESSION TO PLACE TOP PRIORITY ON ASSERTING THE PRIMACY OF FRENCH. WHILE THIS CHOICE APPEALS STRONGLY TO MILITANT NATIONALISTS WITHIN THE PARTY, IT APPEARS FAR LESS VITAL TO AVERAGE QUEBECOIS. AS WE PREDICTED PRIOR TO LAST ELECTION, INTRACTABLE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS MAY BE THE UNDOING OF THE PQ. THEY STILL HAVE ABOUT THREE YEARS BEFORE THEY MUST FACE ANOTHER ELECTION AND SOMEWHAT LESS TIME BEFORE THEY MUST HOLD PROMISED REFERENDUM. NO DOUBT, THEY ARE HOPING FOR A MIRACLE WHICH WILL REVIVE THE NORTH AMERICAN ECONOMY AND PULL QUEBEC OUT OF ITS MALAISE. FINANCE MINISTER PARIZEAU MAY ALSO BE ATTEMPTING BUILD RESERVES WITH AUSTERITY BUDGETS EARLY IN PQ'S TERM HOPING USE THESE RESERVES CREATE FAVORABLE IMPACT ON PUBLIC WITH MORE LAVISH SPENDING CLOSER TO TIME OF REFERENDUM AND OF NEXT GENERAL ELECTION. HOWEVER, IF ECONOMY FAILS TO REVIVE, PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT LIMITED RESOURCES MAY NOT BE LARGE ENOUGH TO MAKE MUCH IMPACT. PQ MIGHT BE ABLE SHIFT

PART OF BLAME FOR FAILURE RESUSCITATE ECONOMY TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. IT MIGHT ALSO CONVINCE SOME VOTERS THAT INFLUENCES OF WORLD-WIDE RECESSION ARE BEYOND ITS INFLUENCE. IN THE END, HOWEVER, MOST QUEBECOIS CONSIDER GOQ AS THEIR GOVERNMENT AND TEND HOLD IT RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVINCE'S PROBLEMS. THIS MAY BE MAGNIFIED IN CASE OF ECONOMY IF LARGER PORTION OF THE POPULATION BEGINS BELIEVE HEAVY BOMBARDMENT OF REPORTS EMANATING FROM BUSINESS COMMUNITY ALLEGING PQ'S SEPARATISM IS HEAVILY RESPONSIBLE FOR LACK OF NEW INVESTMENT, DIMINISHED EMPLOYMENT, AND GENERALLY POOR BUSINESS CONDITIONS. NOT CERTAIN HOW MUCH EFFECT THESE WIDE-SPREAD REPORTS OF BUSINESS DECISIONS CURTAIL INVESTMENTS AND MOVE FROM QUEBEC HAVE HAD UP TO NOW ON ATTITUDES OF FRANCOPHONES, BUT WOULD BE SURPRISED IF THEY ARE NOT CONTRIBUTING TO
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APPARENT GROWTH IN OPPOSITION TO SEPARATION.

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4. WHY LANGUAGE BILL NOW?

LANGUAGE LEGISLATION IS LOOKED ON BY PQ AS ESSENTIAL STEP IN CONDITIONING POPULATION TO IDEA OF SEPARATE STATEHOOD. NO DOUBT, THIS WAS ONE REASON FOR GIVING PRIDE OF PLACE TO "BILL 1" IN PQ LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM. ANOTHER FACTOR IN TIMING OF INTRODUCTION OF LANGUAGE BILL SO EARLY IN TERM OF OFFICE

WAS WISH TO GET OVER ACRIMONIOUS DEBATE EARLY IN HOPES THAT EFFECTS OF DISPUTE WOULD BE DISSIPATED BEFORE PQ IS FORCED FACE VOTERS IN REFERENDUM OR IN GENERAL ELECTION. WISE DECISION WAS TAKEN BY GOQ NOT TO REACT IN FORCEFUL WAY TO THREATS OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE BY ANGRY ANGLOPHONE PARENTS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOL BOARDS. AMENDMENTS HAVE ALSO BEEN MADE IN ORIGINAL BILL WHICH MAY OVERCOME SOME OF WORST REGIDITIES AND INEQUITIES. FOR TIME BEING, POTENTIALLY VIOLENT CONFRONTATION OVER THIS HIGHLY EMOTIVE ISSUE HAS BEEN AVOIDED. PQ'S IMAGE, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN DAMAGED BY ITS UNYIELDING INSISTENCE ON BARRING CHILDREN MOVING INTO QUEBEC FROM OTHER CANADIAN PROVINCES WHOSE PARENTS DID NOT ATTEND QUEBEC PRIMARY SCHOOLS FROM ATTENDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS. EVEN THOSE OBSERVERS WHO ARE MOST SYMPATHETIC TO QUEBEC WISHES TO PROTECT LANGUAGE AND CULTURE ARE HARD PUT TO SEE MORE THAN SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE MOTIVATING THIS MOST OBJECTIONABLE

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PROVISION IN LEGISLATION. RESISTENCE TO LEGISLATION HAS NOT ENDED, AND CONFLICT COULD IGNITE INTO MESSY CONFRONTATION AT ANY TIME.

5. CONFLICT WITH BUSINESS COMMUNITY:

SOME OBSERVERS SEE CONFRONTATION WITH BUSINESS COMMUNITY AS CREATING ATMOSPHERE OF CONFLICT SIMILAR TO THAT WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN BOURASSA GOVERNMENT AND LABOR UNIONS. (SEE QUEBEC 0335) QUEBEC VOTERS, IT IS ARGUED, SEEK TRANQUILITY AND WILL TURN AGAINST GOVERNMENT WHICH CANNOT RESOLVE CONFLICT. SINCE MUCH OF PRESENT CONFRONTATION APPEARS TO AVERAGE QUEBECOIS AS CENTERING ON LONGSTANDING ISSUE OF ANGLOPHONE DOMINANCE OF BUSINESS LIFE OF QUEBEC, HE PROBABLY VIEWS IT IN FAVORABLE CONTEXT OF ASSERTION OF QUEBECOIS RIGHT TO BE "MAITRES CHEZ NOUS." THUS, ANALOGY WITH SITUATION WHICH RESULTED IN LIBERAL DEFEAT MAY NOT BE ACCURATE. MY OWN GUESS WOULD BE THAT CONFLICT WITH BUSINESS COMMUNITY IS MORE LIKELY TO HARM PQ IN CONTEXT OF PRESENT ECONOMIC RECESSION. AS PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED, SHOULD AVERAGE QUEBECOIS COME TO BELIEVE NATIONALIST STRUGGLE AND CONFLICT WITH BUSINESS ARE EXACERBATING UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM OR THAT THEY ARE CAUSING SERIOUS DECLINE IN HIS STANDARD OF LIVING, HE IS LIKELY REACT AGAINST PQ AND REJECT INDEPENDENCE GOAL. OTHERWISE, HE IS MORE INCLINED TO CHEER. IN SHORT, AS LONG AS HARD TIMES PERSIST, THE STRUGGLE IN QUEBEC IS LIKELY REVOLVE AROUND HEART AND POCKETBOOK WITH LATTER ENJOYING DISTINCT ADVANTAGE.

6. CONCLUSION: ONE CAN COME TO A NUMBER OF TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS ON BASIS PQ GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE TO DATE. FIRST, PQ HAS MADE NO DISCERNIBLE HEADWAY IN INCREASING SUPPORT FOR SEPARATISM. SECOND, BOTH PQ AND LEVESQUE HAVE RETAINED WIDESPREAD POPULARITY AMONG THEIR FRANCOPHONE CLIENTELE DESPITE FAILURE

TO PRODUCE MUCH IN TERMS OF PROMISED LEGISLATION OR TO EFFECT-
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IVELY COMBAT GROWING UNEMPLOYMENT. THIRD, ECONOMIC CRISIS HAS DAMPENED ENTHUSIASM FOR POLITICAL ADVENTURES EXCEPT AMONG THOSE ELEMENTS MOST INSULATED FROM HARSHER ASPECTS OF RECESSION SUCH AS CIVIL SERVANTS, TEACHERS, AND THOSE BLESSED WITH COMFORT-ABLE LIBERAL PROFESSIONS. FOURTH, PQ HAS GAINED CONFIDENCE OF PEOPLE IN ITS HONESTY AND DEDICATION. FIFTH, PQ HAS SO FAR PROVEN ABLE TO PREVENT PREVIOUSLY PREDICTED OPEN SQUABBLING WITHIN ITS RANKS AND OPEN CHALLENGES TO LEADERSHIP. HOWEVER, IT HAS NOT YET DEMONSTRATED ITS ABILITY TO MAINTAIN UNITY WHILE CARRYING OUT AN EFFECTIVE, COHERENT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRAM DURING TIMES WHEN MONEY IS VERY SHORT. SIXTH, PQ HAS NOT DEMONSTRATED ABILITY TO QUIET, OR EVEN LIMIT, GROWING CONFRONTATION WITH BUSINESS. SEVENTH, RENE LEVESQUE HAS NOT ALWAYS APPEARED BE ABLE ASSERT HIS OWN WILL WITHIN CABINET. CLEARLY HIS POSITION IS MORE "PRIMUS INTER PARES" THAN DICTATORIAL. EIGHTH, THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT HAS BEEN SPOTTY. THE PROVINCIAL POLICE STRIKE, FOR INSTANCE, WAS SETTLED IN A FIRM SURE-HANDED MANNER. THE INDEPENDENT DUMP TRUCK OWNERS DEMONSTRATION, ON THE OTHER HAND, ENDED IN EMBARRASSING CAPITULATION BY THE GOVERNMENT. NINTH, THE PRESS--BOTH ANGLOPHONE AND FRANCOPHONE--HAS BEEN AMAZINGLY NON-CRITICAL OF PQ ACTIONS. LEVESQUE'S APPEALING OPEN PERSONALITY AND HIS EXPERIENCE AS A JOURNALIST NO DOUBT HAVE BEEN IMPORTANT IN WOOING HIS FORMER COLLEAGUES. THERE ARE SIGNS PRESS MAY BE BEGINNING TAKE MORE CRITICAL VIEW OF PQ, BUT THEY REMAIN FAR FROM STATE OF OPEN WAR WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN PRESS AND BOURASSA REGIME IN ITS LAST DAYS. TENTH, STATE OF ECONOMY IS LIKELY HOLD KEY TO SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF PQ DURING THE REST OF ITS TERM OF OFFICE. IT IS ALSO LIKELY BE A DETERMINANT FACTOR IN REGARDS SOVEREIGNTIST REFERENDUM.

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7. SPECULATION: UNDER BEST OF ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES CHANCES OF FAVORABLE VOTE ON REFERENDUM DURING PQ'S FIRST TERM DO NOT AT THE PRESENT SEEM BRIGHT. PROSPECTS ARE EVEN SLIMMER IF ECONOMY REMAINS IN PRESENT DOLDRUMS. THEREFORE, IT MAY BE WORTH SPECULATING ON WHAT LEVESQUE AND HIS CANNY STRATEGIST, CLAUDE MORIN, MIGHT BE CONSIDERING AS MIDDLE RANGE STRATEGY SHOULD FIRST ATTEMPT AT REFERENDUM FAIL. HIGHLY RESPECTED MCGILL UNIVERSITY POLLSTER, MAURICE PINARD, BELIEVES PQ, CAPITALIZING ON QUEBECOIS "REMORSE," COULD HANDILY WIN AN ELECTION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING A REFERENDUM DEFEAT. HE AGREES WITH ME THAT SUCH A SCENARIO MIGHT ALSO PROVIDE ATTRACTIVE OPPORTUNITY TO LEVESQUE TO RID HIMSELF OF PQ'S RADICAL WING WHICH CAME INTO PARTY ORIGINALLY FROM "RASSEMBLEMENT INDEPENDENTISTE NATIONALE" (RIN) OF THE EARLY 60'S. LEVESQUE HAS NEVER FELT COMFORTABLE WITH THIS GRAB-BAG OF TROTSKYITES, MAOISTS, AND ASSORTED IDEOLOGUES DEVOTED MORE TO SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REFORM THAN TO LEVESQUE'S MORE BOURGEOIS CONCEPTS OF NATIONALISM. ALTHOUGH THEY ARE NOT LARGE IN NUMBERS, THEY ARE WELL ENTRENCHED IN PARTY MACHINERY AND ARE VERY VOCAL AT PARTY MEETINGS. THUS, THEY CONSTITUTE A REAL THORN IN LEVESQUE'S SIDE. HE HAS MADE REAL EFFORT CHANGE IMAGE OF PARTY TO ONE OF MODERATION. FINAL DEPARTURE
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OF RADICALS WOULD COMPLETE THIS EFFORT. BOTH CLAUDE MORIN AND JEAN PAUL L'ALLIER, FORMER LIBERAL MINISTER OF CULTURE, HAVE HINTED TO ME OF POSSIBILITY OF SOME FUTURE REALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL FORCES IN QUEBEC. MODERATE WING OF PQ AND PROGRESSIVE WING OF LIBERALS ARE VERY CLOSE IN THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS QUEBECOIS NATIONALISM AND IN THEIR PREFERENCE FOR SOCIAL-DEMOCRACY. ONLY MAJOR SOURCE OF DIVISION SEEMS BE THEIR DIFFERENCES OVER NATURE OF QUEBEC'S FUTURE ASSOCIATION WITH REST OF CANADA. BOTH REJECT CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS QUO. LIBERALS WANT LOOSER CONFEDERAL SCHEME WITH VIRTUALLY AUTONOMOUS QUEBEC. PQ MODERATES SAY THEY WANT POLITICALLY "SOVEREIGN" QUEBEC IN CLOSE ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH REMAINDER OF CANADA. PRACTICAL DIFFERENCES--AS THEY DESCRIBE THEM--DO NOT APPEAR BE GREAT. I BELIEVE IT WOULD BE COMPARATIVELY EASY TO FIND CONSTITUTIONAL FORMULA ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH ONCE "RIN" ALBATROSS REMOVED FROM PQ MODERATES NECK. SUCH A FORMULA COULD BE ULTIMATE

SALVATION OF CANADIAN UNITY, ALBEIT IN MUCH ATTENUATED FORM.
THIS SCENARIO MAY SEEM UNREAL AT PRESENT. BUT, I WOULD BE VERY
SURPRISED IF IT, OR SOMETHING VERY SIMILAR, HAS NOT OCCURRED
TO CLAUDE MORIN.
MCNAMARA

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